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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 003988

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [TU](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: TURCO-ISRAELI RELATIONS REMAIN ACTIVE BUT UNDERGOING RECALIBRATION

(U) Classified by CDA Robert Deutsch; reasons: 1.4 b,d.

1. (C) Summary: July 13-15 visit to Turkey of Israeli Deputy PM Olmert demonstrated that Turco-Israeli relations have broadened beyond the mil-mil/intel ties that have hitherto formed the core of the relationship. In the Israeli view the visit cast in sharp relief the rivalry (which we have previously reported) between Turkish PM Erdogan and FonMin Gul, with the latter openly deprecating his boss to Olmert. At the same time the visit underscored that Israel needs to broaden its support in Turkey beyond the narrow slice of the Turkish elite and adapt to the new Turkish political dynamic. End summary.

2. (C) In contrast to Turkish press reports which played up PM Erdogan's refusal to meet Olmert, the visit was a success according to MFA, ruling AK Party (AKP), and Israeli Embassy contacts. Our interlocutors, including MFA DDG for Middle East Gokturk, AKP deputy chairman for foreign policy Disli, and Israeli Ambassador Avivi, all asserted that relations will continue to be active. Erdogan did not receive Olmert partly because of the manner in which Olmert demanded a meeting ("We request a meeting with PM Erdogan at x hour on x date"), partly for domestic political reasons. Nevertheless, Olmert had a series of highest-level meetings -- characterized as warm and constructive by all our interlocutors -- with President Sezer, FonMin Gul (including a very cordial dinner hosted by Gul), and various ministers.

3. (S) As we understand it, intel and military cooperation in specific areas has never stopped, although we have heard from one contact with long-standing connections to military intel and the national intel organization (MIT) that Turkish intel services are increasingly irritated by Israeli pushiness.

4. (C) MFA and Israeli interlocutors told us commercial relations have room to grow, despite recent progress on what they characterize as mutually beneficial business agreements. We continue to hear from others, however, that the Turks are irritated by what they see as Israeli foot-dragging on agreeing to purchase water from the Manavgat river in southern Turkey, foot-dragging they interpret as part of Israel's policy of keeping Turkey dangling. Agriculture and irrigation joint venture projects in the GAP region of southeastern Turkey also have potential to grow but, judging by Olmert's public statements, there appears to be mutual distrust regarding faithfulness to contracts and commitments.

5. (C) Avivi said he was struck by what he noted were uncharacteristically warm receptions from Sezer and Gul and unexpected, deprecating remarks from Gul about Erdogan; evidence he asserted further highlighted fissures in AKP. Avivi told us "Israel has a great problem with Erdogan" and the pendulum effect Erdogan's public statements are having on the Turkish population at large. According to Avivi, Gul told Olmert 1) 'Erdogan is not like me, he's a simple person with no diplomatic training'; 2) Erdogan's recent statements about Israel are not constructive; and 3) 'Erdogan is going to damage our relationship'. Avivi further asserted that "Israel will not be a shock absorber for everything Erdogan wants to say". Avivi believes Turks noticed Israeli reactions, especially a decrease in tourism, the El-Al stoppage and took a lesson on the limits of criticism from that.

6. (C) In contrast, Middle East Department DDG Gokturk retreated to standard MFA talking points: 1) Erdogan's comments should not be taken out of context, particularly because GOT actions toward Israel have been positive; 2) present and future relations between Turkey and Israel are in line with historic friendly relations with Israel; and 3) the GOT is aggressively searching for an important role in the Middle East peace process. Despite what Gokturk characterized as an "age-old friendship" between Turkey and Jews, he noted as hindrances to the relationship 1) Turkish concerns about reports that Israelis are operating in Northern Iraq and could support an independent Kurdish state and 2) public sympathy for the plight of Palestinians. Gokturk also highlighted the potential for Turkey to play a facilitating role in a Syria-Israel track as an attraction creating additional support for the relationship. Avivi indicated that Israel is interested in the Turk's in an information role, but he said they had not agreed to their efforts to act as a facilitator.

17. (C) The visit also illustrated that political relations will continue but be more complex for several reasons:

--Israel has taken its relations for granted and has not understood the deep changes in Turkish society. In this regard, Israel has built its relations through (a) Jews in Istanbul; (b) Turks from the elite; (c) the Turkish General Staff; (d) high bureaucrats.

--Turks across the board favor the underdog and in this case they are deeply sympathetic to the Palestinians. Turks from all sectors and political persuasions have been repeatedly shocked by the current GOI's actions, even while they ignore the similar methods Ankara used against the PKK/Kurds in the 1990's.

--Whatever is happening in northern Iraq regarding Israeli presence or influence, and however questionable Turkish intel sources may be, neither the TGS, nor the GOT, nor the man in the street believes GOI denials that Israel is training peshmergas or organizing a wholesale buy-up of land.

18. (C) Comment: Turkish Israeli relations have a continuing basis of mutual interest in business, military and intelligence communities, but those support elements are weakening. It remains to be seen how far they will recede and whether a basis can be established with the emerging power elements in AKP. Developments in the region beyond Turkish-Israeli issues likely will have a significant impact.
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